DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 420 CG 016 954

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TITLE Helping Behavior: Effects of Stress and Commonality of Fate on Females.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Southwestern Psychological Association (29th, San Antonio, TX, April 21-23, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Anxiety; Behavior Patterns; College Students; Cooperation; *Females; *Group Unity; Higher Education; Interaction; *Prosocial Behavior; Sex Differences; *Stress Variables
IDENTIFIERS Commonality; *Helping Behavior

ABSTRACT

Research has suggested that people not sharing a common fate lack a sense of group identity, thus decreasing the tendency for helping behavior. To study the effects of stress and commonality of fate on helping behavior, 60 female college students participated in a replication of an earlier study which used male subjects. Participants were assigned to one of four conditions: (1) high stress/common fate (both subject and confederate were told they would be participating in a shock experiment); (2) high stress/dissimilar fate (subject and confederate were told they would be participating in a shock experiment or a word association experiment, respectively); (3) low stress/common fate (both subject and confederate were told they would be participating in a word association experiment); and (4) low stress/dissimilar fate (subject and confederate were told they would be participating in a word association experiment or a shock experiment, respectively). While filling out a participation receipt form, the confederate "accidently" knocked over a container of 100 pencils. The amount of helping behavior by subjects in each condition was measured by the number of pencils each subject picked up and the total number of subjects helping in each condition. Consistent with the original study a significant interaction was found, indicating that subjects were more helpful under conditions of high stress and common fate. Results also revealed a greater overall amount of helping behavior than that found by Dovidio and Morris (1975), which may have been influenced by situation variables or the subjects' backgrounds. (Author/JAC)

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Helping Behavior: Effects of Stress and Commonality of Fate on Females

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Abstract

In a design replication of Dovidio and Morris' (1975) study, the effects of stress and commonality of fate on helping behavior were examined. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: high stress/common fate (both subject and confederate were told they would be participating in a shock experiment), high stress/dissimilar fate (subject and confederate were told they would be participating in a shock experiment and a word association experiment, respectively), low stress/common fate (both subject and confederate were told they would be participating in a word association experiment), and low stress/dissimilar fate (subject and confederate were told they would be participating in a word association experiment and a shock experiment, respectively). While the initial study involved male subjects, the present study involved females. Consistent with the original study, a significant interaction was found, indicating that subjects were more helpful under conditions of high stress and common fate. Results also revealed a greater overall amount of helping behavior than that found by Dovidio and Morris (1975).

Helping Behavior: Effects of Stress and Commonality of Fate on Females

Although substantial research on prosocial behavior has been conducted, researchers still do not fully understand this behavior. In an attempt to explain the totality of helping behavior, studies have been replicated and numerous variables have been examined. Dovidio and Morris (1975) found that high stress, as compared to low stress, magnifies positive helping behavior when individuals share a common fate, and leads to reduced helping behavior under dissimilar fate conditions. These authors inferred from past research that people not sharing a common fate lack a sense of group identity, thus decreasing the tendency for helping behavior.

Batson, Pate, Law, Sparkman, Lambers, and Worman (1979) also investigated helping behavior under conditions of threat and found increased helping behavior when the victim and helper faced a common threat. These authors suggested that helping under conditions of common threat may be motivated by an increased sense of group identity or by a desire to insure future safety. Similar to the study by Dovidio and Morris (1975), this study involved male participants.

The present study is a design replication of the Dovidio and Morris (1975) study. In contrast to the original experiment (which used all males), this replication involved a female experimenter, a female confederate, and only female subjects. In a 2 X 2 factorial design, subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: high stress/common fate, high stress/dissimilar fate, low stress/common fate, and low stress/dissimilar fate. In the high stress condition the subject was told she would be participating in a shock experiment, while in the low stress condition, she was told she

would be participating in a word association study. The commonality of fate variable was manipulated by telling the subject that the confederate would be participating either in the same experiment (common fate condition), or in a different experiment (dissimilar fate condition). It was hypothesized that females would react to the effects of stress and commonality of fate in much the same way as the males reacted in the initial study (Dovidio & Morris, 1975).

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 60 female General Psychology students from a moderately sized midwestern university. All subjects volunteered to participate and received extra course credit.

Procedure

Each subject was greeted in a hallway by the Experimenter, escorted to a "waiting" room, and instructed to sit at a table cluttered with papers, computer cards, books, and a plastic container holding 100 pencils. After the subject was seated, the Experimenter delayed by looking through her notebook until the confederate knocked on the door. The Experimenter looked at her clipboard and then introduced the confederate either as a subject who was participating in the same experiment, or as a subject who was in a different experiment -- common fate or dissimilar fate conditions, respectively. In both conditions, individuals were told that they would be run separately and at different times, but that in order to save time they would receive the introductions together. Participants were then told that the actual experiment would take place in an adjacent room.

In the common fate condition, a written introduction was handed to the confederate and then to the subject. The introduction explained either a

shock or a word association experiment. Next, the Experimenter simultaneously administered the same introductions verbally to the confederate and the subject. In the dissimilar fate condition, the confederate and the subject each received different written introductions and verbal presentations concerning their experiments. The stress manipulation was achieved by redundant information contained in both the written introduction and the verbal presentation of the shock condition.

After presenting the appropriate introductions to the subject and the confederate, the Experimenter asked both participants to answer a short questionnaire at the bottom of their written introduction and, after they had finished, to fill out the attached participation receipt form. The Experimenter then left the room when the individuals began answering the questionnaire.

When the subject began to fill out the participation receipt form, the confederate reached for a pencil and "accidentally" knocked the pencil container to the floor. The confederate then got up from her chair and began to pick up the pencils at a constant rate which allowed her to pick them all up within 2 minutes. The confederate was pretrained to avoid eye contact and conversation with the subject, as much as possible, while the Experimenter was absent from the room. Once the pencils were picked up, the confederate returned to her chair and continued to fill out the forms. The experimental manipulation was complete after all the pencils had been picked up. The amount of helping behavior by subjects in each condition was measured by the number of pencils each subject picked up and by the total number of subjects helping in each condition. At this point the experiment on helping behavior was finished. The remaining activities were used to provide further information and closure for the subject.

Three minutes after the confederate returned to her seat, the Experimenter entered the room and gave the subject and the confederate a standard "pre-experimental" survey form. Two questions embedded in the survey provided information concerning participant anxiety level and knowledge about the upcoming bogus experiment.

When the surveys were complete, the subject and confederate were asked to review what they expected to do in the upcoming bogus experiment, what they thought the experiment was about, and whether they thought there was anything unusual about the way the study had been conducted so far. All participants were than debriefed about the procedures and purpose of the study.

Results

Manipulation Checks

In order to test the effectiveness of the stress manipulation, subjects were asked to complete a post-experimental questionnaire in which they reported their anxiety levels on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In their manipulation checks, Dovidio and Morris (1975) found that high-stress subjects reported significantly more anxiety than low-stress subjects. However, they did not find a significant main effect for fate or a significant interaction between stress and fate. In the present replication, the manipulation checks of the self-report measures showed high-stress subjects ($\bar{x}$ = 3.7) to be somewhat more anxious than those in the low-stress condition, ($\bar{x}$ = 4.1) but this trend did not achieve significance, F (1,56) = .916, ns (lower numbers indicate higher perceived anxiety). There was also no significant main effect for fate and no significant interaction between stress and fate.

Helping Behavior

Table 1 displays the proportion of the students helping and the mean number of pencils picked up in each condition. A comparison of these data with that of Dovidio and Morris (1975) reveals a greater overall amount of helping behavior exhibited in the present replication.

Insert Table 1 about here

As in the original study, an analysis of variance on the transformed data (square-root transformation of the number of pencils) revealed a significant Stress by Commonality of Fate interaction, F (1,56) = 5.014, $p < .05$ (Figure 1 shows the current interaction, and the 1975 interaction). Unlike Morris and Dovidio (1975), a significant main effect for commonality of fate was not found, although the data show a trend in this direction, F (1,56) = 2.304, ns.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Specific comparison tests (Newman-Keuls) revealed that subjects in the high stress/common fate condition helped the confederate significantly more (in terms of number of pencils picked up) than subjects in the low stress/common fate condition, $p < .01$, and that subjects in the high stress/dissimilar fate condition helped the confederate significantly less than subjects in the low stress/dissimilar fate condition, $p < .01$. In looking at Figure 1, it is clear that the stress by fate interactions in both studies are highly similar.

Discussion

The data from the design replication support the findings by Dovidio and Morris (1975) in that subjects were most helpful under conditions of high stress and common fate. An analysis of variance revealed a significant interaction between stress and commonality of fate on helping behavior. This supports the hypothesis that high stress produces positive helping behavior when individuals share a common fate, whereas helping behavior is inhibited when fate is dissimilar.

The replication data show a greater overall amount of helping behavior as compared to the data from the initial study. A possible explanation of this finding lies in the sex difference between the two subject groups employed, as males and females may behave differently in helping situations. The effects of stress and commonality of fate on females' helping behavior have not been studied previously. It is possible that, under these conditions, females are more likely to offer assistance than are males.

The literature on sex differences and prosocial behavior includes conflicting findings. Some researchers (Latane & Dabbs, 1975; Piliavin, Rodin, Piliavin, 1969) have found males to be more helpful than females, while other researchers (Austin, 1978; Lerner & Frank, 1974) have found females to be more helpful. Austin (1979) suggests that the amount of harm to the victim is an important factor to consider when studying sex differences in helping behavior. In his study, he found that females were more helpful overall, helping in both situations of low and high harm to the victim, whereas males tended to help only when harm to the victim was high. Since the situation in the present study involved no harm to the victim, Austin's findings may explain why a greater overall amount of helping behavior was found.

Other factors may account for differences in the amount of helping behavior found between the two studies. For example, the background of the subjects involved in the two studies may have been different enough to lead to divergent results. Most of the subjects in the initial study were presumably raised in urban settings (New York), most of the replication subjects were reared in rural areas (Western Kansas). However, results of studies concerning the residence variable also appear to be inconclusive. For example, Korte and Kerr (1975) found that townspeople tend to offer greater assistance than people from large cities, while Weiner (1976) found that rural subjects are significantly less helpful than their urban counterparts.

It is clear that there are a number of situational factors which influence a person's helping behavior. Although this replication has provided some valuable information concerning the effects of stress and commonality of fate, it has also raised more questions regarding the impact of the interaction of these and other variables (e.g., gender, situation) on helping behavior.

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Table 1

Proportions of Subjects Helping

and the Mean Number of Pencils

Picked Up in Each Condition

	Initial Study		Replication	
Condition[a]	Proportion Helping	M	Proportion Helping	M
HS/CF	13:15	34.13	14:15	52.20
LS/CF	9:15	16.40	13:15	42.07
HS/DF	4:15	10.73	10:15	31.00
LS/DF	9:15	22.86	14:15	46.20

[a]LS = Low Stress

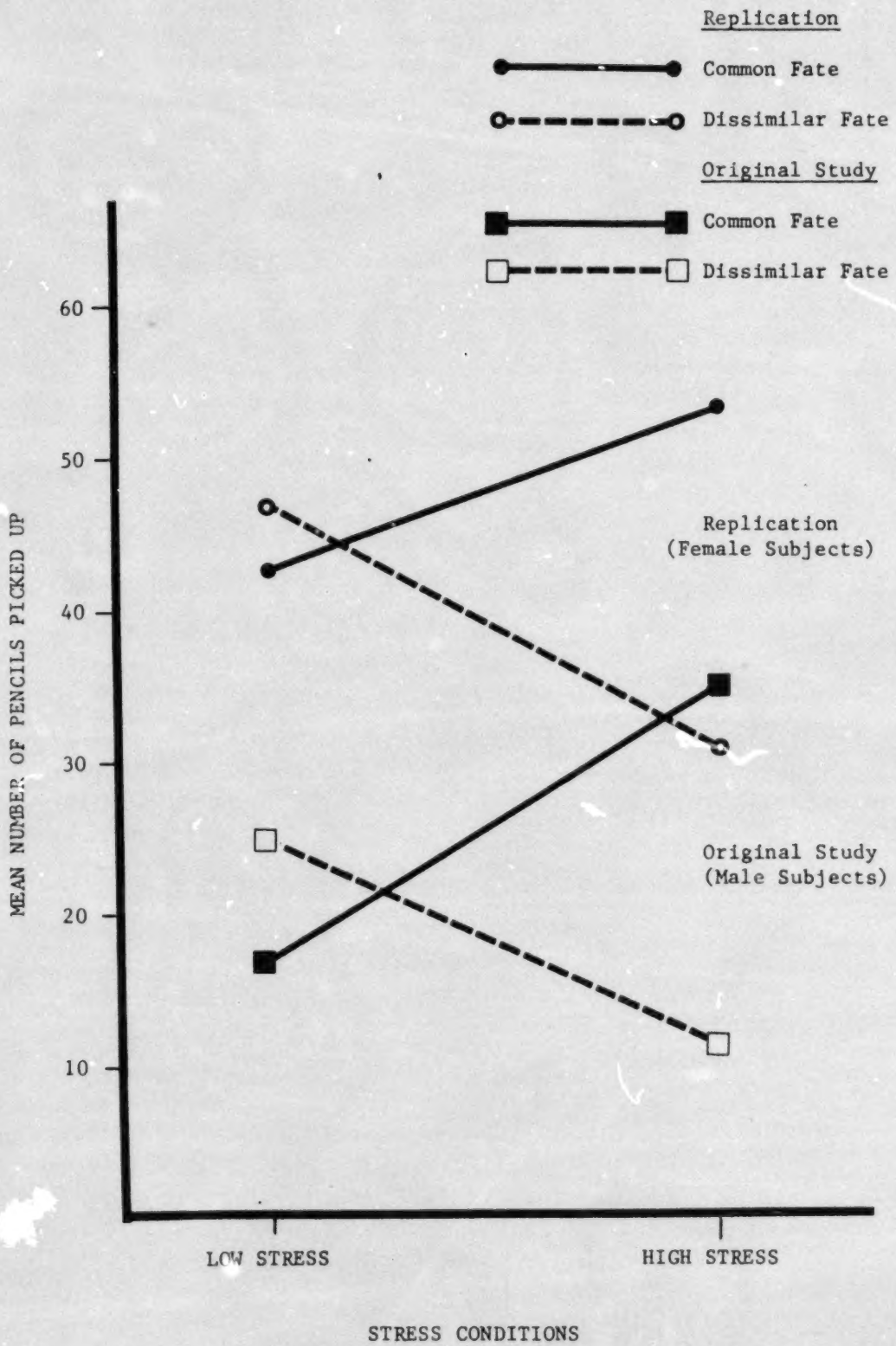
HS = High Stress

CF = Common Fate

DF = Dissimilar Fate

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Stress by commonality of fate interaction for the original study and replication.


Replication
Common Fate
Dissimilar Fate
Original Study
Common Fate
Dissimilar Fate
60
50
40
30
20
10
MEAN NUMBER OF PENCILS PICKED UP
Replication
(Female Subjects)
Original Study
(Male Subjects)
LOW STRESS
HIGH STRESS
STRESS CONDITIONS